


# Back to the basics

**USAREUR's highest-ranking NCO puts  
out the call to refocus training**

**An interview with Command Sgt. Maj. David Lady  
By Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter**





Soldiers in U.S. Army, Europe are known for “being on point for the nation.” For three of the past four years, USAREUR-based soldiers have been the backbone of Task Force Falcon, the Kosovo peacekeeping mission. In addition to the KFOR mission, battalions from the two USAREUR-based divisions – 1st Infantry Division and 1st Armored Division – have rotated through serving as USAREUR’s Immediate Ready Force, a rapid-readiness unit that can deploy anywhere in USAREUR’s theater of operations within 36 hours.

Of course, the soldiers’ operations tempo picked up another notch with the heightened threat following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and it’s hiked up even more with the war with Iraq on everyone’s minds.

At this pivotal point, USAREUR’s highest-ranking enlisted soldier, Command Sgt. Maj. David Lady, has put the call out to all USAREUR NCOs that it’s time to get back to the training basics. While his message is geared toward USAREUR soldiers, it’s valuable guidance that NCOs throughout the Army can use in preparing their soldiers for combat deployments.

For soldiers who think of field training as a necessary evil they must endure only for the length of the exercise, as well as for those who think they are merely “support soldiers,” Lady’s message may serve as something of a reality check, as he dispels some of the myths and busts open some of the excuses.

“Every soldier is a warfighter. Every soldier must be trained to win his or her piece of the war,” said Lady, going straight to the bottom line. “It upsets me when I hear a soldier say, ‘I’m not a warfighter,’ or ‘My job is to support the warfighters.’ We are all warfighters. For example, all signal specialists must accomplish their missions or the maneuvering unit will fail in combat. Every soldier’s mission is important.”

Lady began his career in 1974 as an armored crew member. In 1981, while serving as an instructor at the Armor Center, Fort Knox, Ky., Lady earned the prestigious Joseph H. Hibbs Distinguished Instructor Award. He employs that same no-nonsense tactic to coaching, teaching and mentoring USAREUR soldiers today. Lady’s approach is simple: target the basics skills needed for a combat deployment and charge the NCO leadership with making it happen.

“We [NCOs] exist to demonstrate and enforce standards,” the Washington, D.C., native said. “We are training certain wartime tasks, both individual and team. We’re training with a greater seriousness, because it is not just another [Combined Arms Maneuver Training Center] rotation that we’re ramping up for,” Lady explained.

Lady is adamant that USAREUR NCOs must take advantage of every opportunity, focus every training event and take advantage of times offered.

“It’s not giving excuses. It’s not pretending that we are too busy or too overworked to master the core soldier skills. If we are, we need to prioritize things and go for what’s most important,” he said. Lady’s top priorities for training include field craft, mission-essential crew drills, physical fitness, combat lifesaving skills and marksmanship.



“We must train our soldiers to perform all missions in a field environment under all conditions,” Lady explained. He emphasized that leaders must know the key factors of field craft. NCOs must be capable of demonstrating and enforcing those standards so their soldiers “will be as effective at the end of the operation as they are at the beginning, no matter what conditions they work through.”

“Working in a concrete motorpool with overhead cover, working in a temporary office, even working in the dustbowl of a combat training center for four to 10 days – by themselves – is insufficient training in field craft,” Lady said. “We must be able to be much more than miserable in the field.”

Lady relies on his extensive experience when guiding soldiers. During his 28-year career, he has held every key leadership position from tank commander to acting platoon leader. He has also served as first sergeant for four companies. He has served in his current position since February 2000, marking his fourth tour in USAREUR. In 1983, during one of his previous assignments in Germany, he earned the title of USAREUR NCO of the Year. Lady uses his background and experience, especially his experience in the European theater, to determine the soldiers’ priorities.

“There isn’t enough time to train every soldier on every task, every team on every task, enough to be prepared to perform. We have to prioritize the core individual and team tasks,” he explained.

The second area USAREUR soldiers are training on are team drills, according to Lady. “Whether your team is an infantry squad, a maintenance section or an awards section in a personnel service battalion, every small team should have no more than five or six core tasks that all soldiers know how to do instinc-

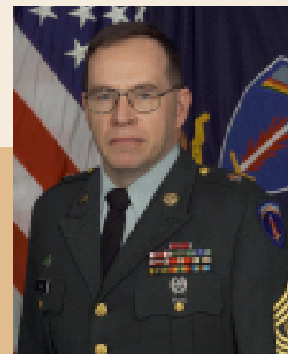
tively and under all conditions,” he said. These should be five or six of the most important activities that contribute to the higher unit’s battle focus and mission essential task list. NCO leaders can prioritize by identifying the tasks that are most critical for their teams to fulfill their roles in the higher unit’s mission, according to Lady.

The third area of emphasis is physical fitness training. Lady said they are focusing on the core physical capabilities the soldiers must have to perform their mission in all conditions.

“We’ve always done physical fitness training four times a week to the Army standard. Yet throughout the force, we haven’t been uniformly combat-oriented. That combat orientation has to be worked out by the company-level leadership for every different type of unit in United States Army, Europe,” Lady explained.

Lady has also placed a great deal of emphasis on the fourth area, advanced first aid training for USAREUR soldiers.

“This is not policy; this is opinion: Every soldier should be a trained combat lifesaver – period,” Lady said. All soldiers must be confident that they can keep their buddies alive, using the equipment within the platoon, until higher echelon medics can arrive and evacuation can take place, regardless of how many combat lifesaver bags are in the team, section or platoon, he said.



**Command Sgt. Maj.  
David L. Lady**





Soldiers need to be confident that if wounded, they will be kept alive by their buddies and that they can keep their buddies alive, he added.

USAREUR soldiers' fifth area of emphasis is basic marksmanship. Lady acknowledged that soldiers do not get to spend as much time at ranges, gunneries and on simulators as they would like in order to improve proficiency, but advises that opportunity training can make all the difference.

Lady used the example of the soldiers of the 2nd Squadron, 6th U.S. Cavalry, 11th Aviation Regiment based in Illesheim, Germany, to illustrate the success of opportunity training. To improve marksmanship, every team would take an M16A2 rifle out of the arms room every day, just one weapon per team. Every day, the NCOs would use breaks and other opportunities to teach skills like the proper way to take up a consistent aim, proper way to breathe and the proper way to pull the trigger.

"Putting the soldier with the weapon on the floor...with something as simple as a washer or dime\* and a sergeant lying next to the soldier would reinforce and raise the standard on the most basic of marksmanship skills," Lady explained. Using this method, the NCOs taught all of the soldiers "low-tech, but crucially important marksmanship skills."

"When that squadron went to the range, they had the highest expert rate in the V Corps," Lady said. "They did it with what the manual provides; they did it in the way that the Army has done it since the Civil War. Those NCOs trained their own soldiers to master the subtasks so that the task was made easier and was done to a higher standard."

While Lady strongly emphasized the importance of opportunity training every day, he also stressed the importance of safety in every mission and exercise.

"We must ensure the safety of our soldiers and equipment," Lady advised. "Do risk assessments each and every time. If you are conducting convoy operations, make sure all drivers are trained and briefed on the route. Inspect vehicles and ensure all are fully mission capable. Plan regular rest stops with adequate time for preventive maintenance. This too can be taught every day as opportunity training. Enforcing safety standards will make sure that all of our soldiers arrive on the battlefield, ready for battle."

Preparing for deployment, preparing for success on the battlefield, it all comes down to reinforcing the basics: field craft, mission-essential crew drills, physical fitness, combat lifesaving skills and marksmanship, Lady said.

"These are the five areas we are emphasizing in the United States Army, Europe at the individual and small-unit level to prepare us for contingency operations," Lady said. "This training will build confidence in each individual, will build cohesion in every unit and will give the nation victory and bring our soldiers home to celebrate the victory. It is our responsibility, and it's our glory as NCOs to do this."

*\* FM 23-9, M16A1 and M16A2 Rifle Marksmanship, July 3, 1989, Appendix C: The Dime (Washer) Exercise is a dry-fire technique used to teach or evaluate the skill of trigger squeeze and is effective when conducted from an unsupported firing position.*



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